

Arlington Heights, Ill. – U.S. Representative Mark Kirk joined with more than 800 students and teachers to celebrate Thomas Middle School's recently built solar power array. Kirk also unveiled new bipartisan legislation to foster public/private partnerships backing student-led green school projects to lower energy use and increase alternative energy and recycling. Event attendees included Thomas Middle School principal Tom O'Rourke, science department chair Jay Bingaman and members of Congressman Kirk's 10th District Parents Advisory Board.

"America's kids can already see many things that should be done," Congressman Kirk said. "Following Thomas' lead, Congress should foster public/private partnerships to inspire other schools to back 'Green School' projects. The addition of solar panels to the school's roof helps save energy, inspiring cutting-edge additions to the school's curriculum. Green Schools not only save taxpayers money, but they also teach our children about safeguarding the environment. By fostering a culture of conservation, we secure the values that will strengthen our country in the new century."

Green Schools require less money to operate, reduce water and energy use. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, Green Schools save an average of \$100,000 per year – or funding to hire two teachers, buy 500 computers or 5,000 textbooks. If all new schools followed green standards, total nationwide energy savings would reach \$20 billion in the next decade.

Last year, Thomas Middle School received a \$10,000 grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation to construct a one-kilowatt solar array for the school. The array was installed in late 2007 and produced enough energy to offset more than 320 pounds of carbon dioxide. The output is equivalent to the energy needed to power 3 homes for one day, or operate a TV 24 hours a day for over a month. Students can get real-time statistics on the solar panels including energy output and carbon dioxide savings by visiting this site:

<http://view2.fatspaniel.net/PV2Web/merge?view=PV/detailDC/HostedAdmin&eid=88637> .

Congressman Kirk's bipartisan legislation, the Green Schools Act (H.R. 6065), enables the Environmental Protection Agency to establish a program to provide matching funds up to up to \$10,000 per school for student and teacher-led green school projects that lower energy use, back renewable energy or spur recycling.

“These matching funds will inspire other students and teachers to learn in Green Schools,” Congressman Kirk said. “It will help them raise funds among parents, knowing the federal government will match their efforts.”

The Green Schools Act also helps schools in low-income areas obtain financing for green rehabilitation projects. It reauthorizes Qualified Zone Academy Bonds for five years to fund green renovations and repairs for qualified schools including:

- Rehabilitation or repair of public school buildings
- Procurement of equipment for public school use
- Development of course materials
- Training for teachers and other school personnel.

The bonds program was established in 1997 and to date has contributed nearly \$1.7 billion for school improvements.

To qualify, schools must meet the following criteria:

- Must be low-income
- Must establish a public/private partnership to enhance academic curriculum, which prepares students for the workforce or college
- Must meet a 10 percent matching requirement.